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SUBJECT: MOROCCAN PERSPECTIVES ON WHALING COMMISSION

REF: STATE 57029

¶1. (SBU) Econoff delivered reftel demarche on June 8 to Abdelouahed Benabbou, Director of Cooperation and Legal Affairs and Morocco's Commissioner at the International Whaling Commission (IWC), and Mohamed Yassine El Aroussi, head of Bilateral Cooperation, at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Benabbou stated that Morocco will maintain, at the upcoming IWC meeting, a moderate position that recognizes the importance of "culture, history, and subsistence needs in sustainable exploitation" of whales, yet also recognizes the need to protect whale populations. Though Morocco has no direct interest in whaling, Benabbou emphasized, IWC membership is part of its responsibilities as a maritime country.

¶2. (SBU) Responding to reftel questions on Morocco's views of IWC issues, Benabbou suggested that IWC meetings would be more effective if parties avoided "extreme positions" and agreed to "adhere to current IWC statutes" instead of proposing fundamental changes, such as efforts to ban all exploitation of whales. Such agreement on maintaining the current statutes and principles will head off efforts to replace the IWC with a new organization. Benabbou assessed that dialogue often breaks down when Japan feels that other parties are trying to dictate to it or lecture it, and suggested that parties seek to maintain respect for opposing positions.

¶3. (SBU) Benabbou concurred that the Small Working Group (SWG) should continue its work for an additional year. He observed that the SWG would be most efficient if the number of participants is maintained at the minimum number required to include all of the points of view within the IWC. That said, he continued, any country that strongly seeks to participate should not be excluded. Benabbou assented to the participation as observers of non-governmental and other organizations in the work of the SWG and the IWC in general, to maximize transparency.

¶4. (SBU) Benabbou praised the work of current IWC Chair Bill Hogarth, as well as the positive attitudes of the Japanese Vice-Chairs. "It will be hard to replace" the current chair, he said. Although Benabbou offered no suggestions for a new Chair or Vice-Chair, he emphasized the need for consensus candidates.

¶5. (SBU) Benabbou confirmed that Morocco had submitted that morning a formal proposal to the IWC Secretariat to host the 2010 meetings of the IWC in Morocco, perhaps in Agadir. Any financial support from the U.S. or other parties would be welcome, he noted.

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